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ABSTRACT

This essay contends that the goals of the Civil Rights movement, desegregation and integration of schools and public facilities, were misplaced, and that what blacks needed then, and need today, was equalization of resources and facilities, and equal representation on boards of education. Continued efforts at reliance of those outside the black community, as embodied by affirmative action programs, have produced minimal results. A call is issued to blacks to look within themselves, individually and collectively, for solutions to the host of problems that continue to plague the majority of blacks in the United States. (DB)

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An Obituary to Affirmative Action and a Call for Self-Reliance

The Harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved. Jer. 8:20

The paper was presented at the 20th Annual Dr. Carter G. Woodson Commemorative Brunch - of the Local Chicago Branch of the Association for the Study of African Life and History, on February 8, 1992 by Prof. E. Marvin Goodwin - Professor of History/Social Science, Kennedy-King College, Chicago, Illinois

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The central focus of the 1960s and 1970s in America's life was the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. These movements were initiated in 1954 with the Brown versus Topeka Board of Education, Supreme Court decision and closed with the 1964 Civil Rights Act. A number of new leaders and protest techniques came into being, as well as unparalleled white support, and impressive victories. There was a euphoric confidence and belief that the quality of life, particularly for African Americans, would improve with integration of society - that Black boys and girls would receive a much better education - that integrating neighborhoods, and the work place would revolutionize African Americans' life chances. But as noted by Prof. Derick Bell: integration and desegregation were more beneficial to whites than to Blacks. When school districts finally admitted more than a token number of African American students to previously white schools, the action usually resulted in closing Black schools, the removal of Black teachers, and

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demoting, and often degrading, Black principals. Black faculty, in all too many cases, became victims of integration. To equate integration with the effective education of Black children - was a mistake. Upon reflection, it becomes perfectly clear, we did not need desegregation or integration, what we needed, then as now, was equalization of resources and facilities, and equal representation on boards of education. Thus the Civil Rights movement raised expectation it could not fulfill, and lay bare problems to which mere integration and desegregation could not or did nct find solutions.

By the end of the decade of the 1960s there was a general feeling within many of the white communities, that African Americans had gone too far - or were receiving more then their fair share - they had been given too much - thus whites began to say "enough is enough" and demanded an end to agitation. Combining with their Southern counterparts, those pushing anti-desegregation and resistance to government assistance in improving the economic and social lot of America's Black population, a new phenomena came into being - the white backlash - opposition to integrated employment, housing and education.

The faith of the Civil Rights movement and its leaders was placed in the conscience and purported good will of the white majority, and in the assistance of the federal

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government. In both arenas the movement was sorely disappointed. However, when the movement expanded its demands from equal rights to the abolition or remediation of unemployment/underemployment, poor and inadequate housing, illiteracy, poverty, and the host of other problems which plagued the African Americans communities across the nation, white America became more recalcitrant. There were the issues of rents and food prices that were higher for ghetto dwellers than for suburban whites. The movement leaders pointed to the inadequate apprentice systems, designed to keep Black union members at lower wage scales, university admission polices that tacitly condoned inferior secondary education - these and scores of other common practices, for which no one seemed responsible or cared, and could not be cured by integration, were issues pursued and pushed by Civil Rights and Black Power leaders. In all these issues the gains were minimum, but the loses were massive. To be sure, the Black middle class saw its ranks increase, but not enough for feelings of great elation.

Some Blacks who were marginally near the line separating working class and middle-class, were able through affirmative action to secure a foothold in the ranks of the Black middle-class. When one researches the policies and operation of affirmative action programs, one is made aware of their inadequacies, and that the masses of African Americans did not benefit from Affirmative Action. The masses of African

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Americans are today socially, politically, economically, and educationally worst off than they were twenty-five to thirty years ago. In short the struggles waged by the Civil Rights and Black Power leaders for affirmative action have produced minimal results. Indeed, The Harvest is Past, the Summer is Ended, And We Are Not Saved.

Perhaps there some who would remind me that Black men and women now sit on boards of directors of white banks and corporations - to that I would agree - or that Black boys and girls now attend white universities, in both North and South - to that I would agree - or that Blacks live in once exclusive white suburbs, and own or co-owm with the banks or mortgage companies houses costing a hundred thousand to one-half a million or more dollars, and to that I also agree. But how does any of these facts offer hope to the massive numbers of Black homeless, hungry, unemployed and uneducated?

Affirmative action benefited the few, but today for all practical purposes Affirmative action is dead, and the welfare system, on which so many of our people rely, is in intensive care. -The Harvest is past, the Summer is ended, and we are not saved.

For a moment let us look at some of the problems confronting us, and then ask ourselves what can we do to assist in bring about some solutions. While we are pondering, let us also add to the equation the individual responsibility of those we want to assist in bring solutions

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to problems we collectively face - some of which was brought about by themselves.

As a people and a community, we must resist efforts to always seek the causes and solution of our problems in others, outside of the Black community. Likewise we must cast aside the rhetoric of white and Black supposed leaders, which says the solutions to our problems are in the hands of those outside of our community.

I make no attempt to wash the hands of those who oppress us from outside of our communities. To be sure they are culpable, but oppression, be it educational, economic, social or political is not a new phenomena for Black Americans, We endured through struggle the pains of inhuman slavery. We endured the Civil War, the decade of Reconstruction and its aftermath - Racial hostilities, segregation and discrimination of all kinds. We endured the ropes of lynch law - second class citizenship - we endured all the deprivation white America could put upon us. But through all the racial hostilities and injustices we were filled with the hopes of a brighter day. Thus we sang, " I am so glad that trouble don't last always". Because for the most part we knew who our enemies were -they were outside of our communities. Therefore, we could create within the community a sense of unity. Today the enemies remain at the doors of our homes and communities. We must be ever vigilant, to keep

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our senses attune to subtle and the not so subtle attacks from the enemies with out. But let me share a secret with you, "the enemies we face today are in many ways much more dangerous to our homes and communities" because they are within. As written in a World War II cartoon - "We have met the enemy and the enemy is us" Arguments are constantly being made that the major institutions of the Black community are under attack, and this is true. But those who make these arguments would have us believe that only external forces are leading the attacks against Black institutions, although many of us are aware that there are some among our ranks whose hands dripping with the life's blood of many of the young and old within our community. Well do I remember, as do many of you, the old Negro spiritual that says: Its me, Its me Oh Lord standing in the need of prayer, not my sister, not my brother but its me standing in the need of prayer". There is guilt enough for all to share.

The many problems facing Black America today are a direct result of the permissive and decadent decades of the sixties and seventies. While Black leaders had their eyes and ears open to the issues of civil rights, integration and affirmative action, few were watching the moral decay of our society. When we awoke we found our communities in ruins. Our sons and daughters had chosen the worst of the larger society to emulate. We are paying the price in drug rehab

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center, larger prisons, dysfunctional families and an abundance of teenage parents.

The themes of the generation of the sixties and seventies were "relevance and if it feels good, do it." It was a generation fuel by the physical and materialistic, whose moral and spiritual values were drastically altered.

Unquestioning, many Blacks from all walks of life bought into this new morality. It invaded our livingrooms and bedrooms. The magazines and newspapers and talkshows were filled with it. It infected major Black institutions - schools as well as churches. Particularly hard hit by this shift in morals was the Black family. The Black family that had been a viable institution was by 1980s one of the most dysfunctional. As pointed out by Prof. Robert Staples in his work The Urban Plantation, "In the 1930s husband-wife family represented 80 % of Black households, but fewer than 40% in the 1980s and 90s". Historically the Black family was the bastion of stability, even in difficult and oppressive times. Fathers and mothers were eager and insisted that their children do better in life than themselves. Sons and daughters were taught the meaning of manhood and womanhood - responsibility. They were encouraged to accept responsibility for their actions.

Statistically, Blacks were more likely than whites to have been once married. Recent trends indicate an increase

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in marriages among whites and a decline among Blacks. The reasons for these changes vary with the segment of the Black population (Staples, 1987). But the effects of marriage instability have been devastating to the concept of family, parenting, teenage pregnancy, education and Black criminality.

Under contemporary condition the largest proportion of families headed by women are predominantly a result of two precipitating factors: The high divorce and separation rate and out-of-wedlock pregnancies, primarily teenagers.

Teenage pregnancies are at alarming rate. In 1989 one million teenagers gave birth to babies, of this number 61% were Black teenagers (610,000) - many of whom already had children by a previous pregnancy. A large portion of these girls will be heads of dysfunctional households. They will be children attempting to raise children. They will be another sacrifice to the welfare roles. The vast majority of these young parents have not finished high school, nor do they possess marketable skills - Thus they and their children will begin the welfare cycle, going nowhere, merely perpetuating the poverty cycle. And Thus we as a people are worst off than we were twenty-five years ago. We must reverse the trend in teenage pregnancy, and give our girls a sense of respect. They must be taught to love themselves - until they learn to love themselves, they will continue to

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seek approval of young men whose minds are constantly being inundated by sex and no sense of responsibility. We must encourage our young Black men and women to return to school in order to be able to better take charge of their lives. The Harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved.

The dysfunctional family, the product of the new morality, produced sons with no nurturing fathers to provide correct role models of responsibility. Therefore, they sought role models wherever they could. - gang leaders - drug pushers - and pimps. These became the role models. Manhood was gauged by your prison rap sheet, by ruthlessness, how much money one could make dealing drugs and how many babies one fathered. No one bothered to tell our sons they were our future, or that manhood was not measured from the waist down or that is was not how many children one fathered that measured manhood, but rather how many children one took responsibility.

Education in the Black community is at the crisis level. The inability of integration to bring about meaningful intellectual uplift to Black children should be clear to most of us. The drop-out rate is at an all time high. For the most part teachers, no matter how prepared and how hard they try, find their efforts ineffective and useless. New pedagogical methods are unable to provide solutions to poor

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test scores and discipline problems which plague the educational system.

Thinking out loud, I asked myself these questions: why were Black schools apparently more effective and produced academic excellence among its student body, before affirmative action and integration enter the picture? What made schools, even with limited resources, produce young men and women who could read, write and compute? Why were the schools of thirty to forty years ago able to maintain discipline and produce scholar in all fields of endeavor?

Some answers seemed so obvious: education was viewed as a high prize. Many parents, who themselves had not, through economic, social or racial pressure, been able to get an education were insisted that their children be afforded the opportunity denied themselves. Secondly, teachers and parents worked together for the greater good of the child. Discipline was maintained in the classroom because the teacher was the authority. He or she knew that if problems arose, they had parental support - even if it meant applying the hand of righteousness to the seat of knowledge. Thirdly, education was also a community concern, because members of the community wanted to know how the children of the community were faring in school. This occurred long before there units called local school councils. The parents, churches, teachers and community leaders were the councils,

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and the teachers lived in the communities in which they taught. These factors provided our children with an incentive to do well in school. Fourth, there was the factor of dedication of teachers to their charges, and not to the clock or financial advancement. No one ever got rich teaching school - then or now. Teachers were willing to give of their time and talents, over and above what was required. In those segregated Black schools, those underpaid teachers, nevertheless, instilled in the Black boys and girls they taught a sense of respect - respect for themselves, their parents, their communities and certainly for their heritage. What is missing today, since integration, is a sense of community - teachers, students, parents, and community leaders who are intrinsically part of the community. Integration in any meaningful sense has destroyed the feeling of community. There are feelings of alienation in all segments of what once was community. A large segment of our youth feel a sense of alienation, and have lost respect for themselves, parents, teachers and most other leaders in the community. We do not need further studies of the Black community. We need no more surveys, or research. What we need is a coming together of Black parents, Black educators, Black community leaders and Black institutions to take back our communities from outside control. We need a return to good old moral values in order to direct our communities in

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the way we want them to go. We must rely on our talents and skills, of which we have an abundance.

Let me conclude by relating this little Bible story: in the book of Exodus we are told of the escape of the children of Israel from Egypt. They found themselves surrounded - mountains on both sides - the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaohs army behind them in hot pursuit. They began to complain of their dire circumstances to their leader Moses. Not knowing what to do, he resorts to his only hope God. He complains to God about the peoples' complaining, and God asked him a question - Moses He says, what is it you have in your hand? Moses replies, its a rod Lord. The Lord says to him, "Use it" stretch it out. This same reply can be given to us. We need rely on no one but ourselves. We have the talents, skills, and know how. It is time for us to Use Them.

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